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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON PRESIDENT BUSH'S SPEECH ON  
IRAQ

#### Summary

-- President Bush's June 28 speech in Fort Bragg on the anniversary of the formal return of sovereignty to Iraqis received prominent coverage in all papers published today, June 30. All papers carry wire service reports with extensive excerpts from his speech, mainly focusing on the President's refusal to commit to a "timetable for withdrawing U.S. troops" from Iraq. A number of editorial commentaries reflect on the President's remarks.

#### Editorial Commentary

-- "Liberating Iraq"

Chief Editor Ayman Safadi writes on the back-page of independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad (06/30): "America launched war on Iraq on the pretext of liberating it from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein. The war was successful in eliminating Saddam, but Iraq needs now to be liberated from the chaos that has become prevalent and from the foreign presence on its soil. America cannot deny that fact, and must prepare to leave Iraq by investing more seriously in the development of the Iraqi force that would be qualified to defend the rights of Iraqis to security and stability. America is not going to beat terrorism, violence and the resistance in a direct military confrontation. Restoring security in Iraq will not be accomplished except at the hands of Iraqi forces that defeat the terrorists and an Iraqi political regime that reacts positively towards the legitimate resistance, exposes terrorist organizations and establishes justice and equality among the various sects of the Iraqi people. America thought that it had a grip on the entire truth when it launched the war on Iraq. It acted with arrogance and snobbery that has since led Iraq to the current situation of collapse and deterioration. American policies continue to be formed without sufficient care or concern for the Iraq reality. Funds allocated for the reconstruction of Iraq have doubled the wealth of American companies, but they have not improved the living conditions of the Iraqis, and the military forces continue to act out of sync with political policies, arresting moderate people, provoking good families and violating the sovereignty of Iraqi institutions. Unless the United States acknowledges its failures in Iraq and adopts effective steps towards correcting its policies, President Bush is going to find himself repeating his rejection of a timetable for withdrawing his troops in his farewell speech from the White House. Getting out of the Iraqi dilemma requires in-depth planning that America seems to lack the will to do."

-- "Bush's speech and the occupation's crisis"

Daily columnist Samih Ma'aytah writes on the back-page of independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad (06/30): "U.S. President George Bush was not particularly intelligent in saying there will not be an announcement of a timetable for withdrawing his troops occupying Iraq on the grounds that such could be considered a victory for the resistance. Yet, this American declaration confirms what Bush wanted to deny: even the very thought of withdrawing is in the cards but its rejection is due to fear that it would be seen as a victory for the fighters.. America's problem in Iraq is not just in the military losses or even in the failure of its forces to maintain security; it is in reconstructing Iraq to what it used to be before the war. America is good at disassembling but is totally helpless in reassembling. What it has done so far is that it entrenched sectarianism in the political and

public life.. The Iraqis are worse off than when they were living under the sanctions. America knows that Iraq's problem is not going to be resolved by holding elections under the occupation, but rather by building a new Iraq where its citizens benefit from its riches, have control over their sovereignty and feel safe. This is where the occupation failed. If President Bush refuses to announce a withdrawal timetable now, then he will have to someday."

-- "Bush's speech ."

Chief Editor Taher Udwan writes on the back-page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (06/30): "At first glance, someone reading Bush's recent speech about Iraq would have the impression that America is not going to withdraw from Iraq despite the fact that it has turned into a quagmire for the American troops. Going back to Rumsfeld's remarks a few days ago that the rebellion may last 12 years, the question becomes: will the American war in Iraq last all these years? Bush considers setting a timetable for his troops' withdrawal a grave mistake, a bad message to the Iraqi people, the American soldiers and what he calls the terrorists. The question is: is there anything worse for the Iraqi people and the American soldiers than the current situation, and is there anything better for the terrorists and the resistance than an Iraqi that has been turned by Bush's war into a perfect arena for booby-trapped cars, assassinations, kidnappings and decapitations? Bush purposefully ignored the following facts: the fact that there is a resistance against his troops, which has grown and expanded; the fact that the tragic situation under which the Iraqis live has made the slogans of freedom and democracy a moral and political farce; and the fact that the slogan of rebuilding Iraq has become nothing more than a bitter joke to cover up the theft of 7 billion dollars from the Iraqi people's money, as George Galloway had said.. The Iraqi people and America's soldiers and their families find nothing worse than Bush's messages, bringing them news of an extended war without further purpose or aim than what the world sees today."

-- "Bush's ever shifting mission in Iraq"

Columnist Nawwaf Abul Haija writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (06/30): "U.S. President George Bush's speech did not simply defy the feelings of the American people, but also the feelings of the Iraqi people. The American President declared that he is not going to respond to the demands for scheduling the withdrawal of occupation troops on the pretext that the mission is not yet accomplished, a mission that appears ever shifting. In the beginning, it was the elimination of the Iraqi danger that threatened the world with weapons of mass destruction. Then it became the liberation of Iraq, followed by the establishment of a model for democracy in Iraq, then combating terrorism. The freedom that Bush promised to the Iraqi people has, after two years of occupation, turned into forcing the people of Baghdad to search for water, electricity, fuel and means to stay alive, being the natural results of the loss of security and the destruction of infrastructure.. Why would setting a withdrawal timetable be grave mistake? Because setting the timetable means finding light at the end of the tunnel for the Iraqis.. Bush is defying the fact and he is unwilling to take a decision that would spare the lives of thousands of American soldiers."

HALE